

March 1988

MEMORANDUM FOR: Acting Chairman, NIC
Vice Chairman, NIC

FROM : Harry Cochran *HC*

SUBJECT : Comments on Concept Paper/TOR for SNIE 11/37-88:
USSR: Implications of Withdrawal from Afghanistan

1. If this estimate is to assess the implications of only one outcome--complete withdrawal of Soviet forces--I would suggest that the Scope Note and Key Judgments state this premise explicitly. It will be important to convey to readers that the only purpose of the estimate is to examine potential consequences of withdrawal, not to judge the likelihood of this outcome as opposed to alternative outcomes that may be equally plausible. By stating this premise at the outset, the NIC will be in a better position to avoid misunderstanding and confusion about the purpose of the estimate. In other words, it should be made clear that the purpose is to examine the implications of one scenario, not to assess the probability of several possible courses of action.

2. This recommendation is based on the assumption that the evidence supporting a Soviet intention to withdraw completely is by no means conclusive and unambiguous. Soviet and Afghan statements and actions can be interpreted as pointing toward at least six other scenarios:

(a) a limited withdrawal of 10,000 to 20,000 troops along the lines of the "removal" of six regiments in late 1986 (first announced by Gorbachev at Vladivostok in July)

(b) a highly publicized commencement of "complete withdrawal" that is quickly halted on the ground that the US, Pakistan, China, Iran, Saudi Arabia etc. have not carried out their obligations to end military and financial assistance to the Afghan resistance;

(c) insistence that a withdrawal can be initiated only after resistance training camps in Pakistan are dismantled;

(d) a demand that the mujaheddin must first accept and implement a ceasefire and guarantee safe passage for Soviet troops;

(e) a new condition that a UN "peacekeeping" contingent be established in Afghanistan to separate Soviet and Afghan troops from resistance forces and to monitor and verify a ceasefire and implementation of "non-interference" obligations;

(f) a withdrawal of Soviet forces only from the southern half of the country and creation of a rump state in the 10 provinces north of the Hindu Kush. (The Pakistanis suspect that the Soviets plan to partition Afghanistan; they therefore want assurances that Soviet withdrawals will be regionally balanced).

3. It is perfectly legitimate to limit an estimate to the implications of only one outcome, but care should be taken to avoid an impression that, in defining the premise in these terms, the Community is making a judgment that complete withdrawal is the most likely course of action, or even the only courses that deserves examination. To make such a categorical judgment, a number of considerations, statements, and possible scenarios must be disregarded or arbitrarily excluded. Why, for example, did Gorbachev declare on 8 February that "We are convinced" that a Soviet withdrawal is not "linked with the completion of efforts to set up a new, coalition government in Afghanistan, i.e., with bringing the policy of reconciliation to fruition?" Why did Vorontsov insist on 11 February that "any delays in the signing of The Geneva accords will mean only one thing, and that will be a delay in the withdrawal of Soviet forces." How can Vorontsov's public statement be squared with private comments in late February by a Soviet Foreign Ministry official and the Polish ambassador in Kabul that a Soviet withdrawal will begin on 15 May even if the Geneva accords are not signed? Why are the Pakistanis suspicious that the Soviets intend to withdraw only 10,000 troops and that their real aim is to "influence the US," not to execute a complete withdrawal?

4. In rejecting linkage between a Soviet withdrawal and the formation of a new interim government in Kabul, Gorbachev was fully aware of President Zia's public refusal in January to sign an agreement with the Najibullah regime and Pakistan's insistence that the replacement of this regime by a "legitimate, responsible, broad-based government" is an "indispensable aspect" of any settlement. Although Pakistani Minister of State Noorani indicated in Geneva on 3 March that his government may drop the demand that a new government be established prior to signing the agreements, he continued to link signing to a clear commitment to form a "transitional government."

5. Aside from these unresolved questions of linkage, how do the Soviets assess US intentions in light of the "sense of the Senate" resolution adopted on 29 February which urged that the US "should not cease, suspend, diminish or otherwise restrict assistance to the Afghan resistance...until it is absolutely clear that the Soviets have terminated their military occupation...?" The Senate called for the elimination of "all forms" of Soviet aid to the Kabul regime and urged a "political solution in Kabul acceptable to the resistance." How do the Soviets interpret President Reagan's 29 February pledge that he will not "agree to any steps that would put the Afghan freedom fighters or Afghan

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hopes for self-determination at risk," and the 4 March letter to the President from 51 House members advocating that the US insist on a cutoff of Soviet military assistance to Kabul and the dismantling of Soviet air bases and other military facilities as part of a settlement? If the Soviets do not intend to terminate military assistance to Kabul as part of a partial or complete withdrawal, how do they assess the implications of the State Department statement on 4 March that the US will maintain military assistance to the mujaheddin until there is a "symmetrical cessation of (Soviet) military supplies to the regime in Kabul?" Are the Soviets prepared to bargain over a mutual Soviet-US reduction and ultimate cessation of military assistance, or will they charge that the US requirement of a "symmetrical cessation" of Soviet aid is a US attempt to "scuttle a settlement," as Gorbachev put it. Gorbachev implied that the "non-interference" obligation applies only to foreign support for the mujaheddin, not to Soviet assistance to what he called "a government vested with constitutional authority and wielding real power in the country." He claimed that "the Geneva obligations will close the channels for outside assistance to those who hope to impose their will on the whole nation by armed force." Shevardnadze declared on 6 January that the US must "cease aid to the armed groups waging combat operations in Afghanistan against the peoples' authorities." Only after US assistance stops, he said, will the withdrawal of Soviet troops begin. In view of these unambiguous statements, what are the prospects for securing Soviet agreement to a "symmetrical cessation" of military supplies to Kabul?

6. Given this array of unresolved questions, it seems to me that this estimate would be more valuable and "relevant" if it also addressed several contingencies short of a complete withdrawal. If this option is excluded, the paper should at least make clear why it focuses on only one outcome.